



SARAWAK BAHÁ'Í NEWSLETTER

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Message from the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Sarawak

To the Baha'is of Sarawak

Dearly loved Friends,

By the time this message is read at the Nineteen Day Feast of Sharaf, which means Honour in Arabic, the year 2011 will be drawing to a close soon and a new year will be ushered in its stead, leaving us with less than 5 months for the current Five Year Plan to run the course of its first year. 2011 has indeed been an eventful year for the followers of the Blessed Beauty in Sarawak. It began with the friends, in groups, large and small, carrying out intense study of the 28 December 2010 message of the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors that was held in the Holy Land. It is a lengthy message which contains the features of the current Five Year Plan. This study was all done alongside the Ridvan 2010 message.

It is gratifying to us to see the friends, not *"satisfied with a fragmentary grasp of their contents"*, as the Ridvan 2011 clearly states, *"returning to these messages again and again, singly and in groups, at formal meetings and spontaneous gatherings"* to have a better understanding, which is *"enriched through active and informed participation in the programmes of growth being nurtured in their clusters."* The current Five Year Plan was formally launched in Ridvan this

year. With the focus being in line with the main objective of the 25 year global enterprise undertaken by the worldwide Baha'i community that commenced in 1996, that is, *"advancing the process of entry by troops"*, our sight is now set on raising by Ridvan 2016 the total number of clusters in Sarawak in which *"a programme of growth is underway, at whatever level of intensity,"* to 24. Presently, we only have 18 such clusters. We have every confidence that this target will not only be achieved but exceeded at the conclusion of this current Plan. We are most happy to note that, though still learning about the dynamics of the process of growth, all the clusters with programmes of growth have conformed, however rudimentarily, to the *"rhythm established by pronounced cycles of expansion and consolidation, which, punctuated every three months by a meeting for reflection and planning, are unfolding without interruption"*. We are sure that these clusters and additional ones will, in time, reach further milestones along the path of growth.

Since informing the friends in our 16 Oct 2011 feast message of our decision to hold teaching conferences at the cluster level instead of one major one for the whole of Sarawak, the response from the friends have been most encouraging. There was good turnout in every one of the five

cluster teaching conferences held in Kapit, Sibul, Belimbing Besi, Selangau and Rumah Maxwell recently, with the turnout in two of them exceeding 100! In view of the positive feedback from the participants at these conferences, the respective Regional Baha'i Councils will be planning similar conferences in other clusters. We urge the friends to wholeheartedly participate in such conferences in their respective clusters once the venue and date have been fixed.

Another event of great significance this year is the 4-day course held in last Nov at the Kuching Baha'i Centre on the first of the three units of Ruhi Book 8. As reported in the newsletter for the Feast of Masa'il, the 38 participants of the course were greatly inspired at the end of the study. In the light of such encouraging outcome, we strongly urge the friends who have completed Ruhi Book 7 to join any study circle on this book whenever there is an opportunity to do so. So, 2011 indeed has been an eventful year for all of us. Have an enjoyable Nineteen Day Feast, and we wish you all a "Happy 2012"!

With loving greetings,
Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Sarawak

Huge Turnout at Suai-Niah Cluster Teaching Conference

If number alone is to be the criteria to judge the success of a gathering, then the huge turnout at the just concluded Suai-Niah Cluster Teaching Conference is a huge success indeed!

More than 140 friends, young and old, veteran as well as new Baha'is, converged in Rumah Maxwell (formerly called Rh Libai) to attend a 2-day teaching conference that started at 1pm on Sat 10 Dec 2011 and ended about the same time the next day. The conference was one of the 5 cluster-level conferences held in Sarawak the past several weeks after the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Sarawak informed the friends in last Oct of its decision to have such conferences at cluster level, instead of holding a major one for the whole of Sarawak, after taking into account logistic considerations.

The participants were mainly from 5 clusters, namely, Bakong, Bintulu, Miri, Suai-Niah and Tatau. Representing the Spiritual Assembly in this conference were its three members, namely, Mr. K C Yong, Mrs Marilyn Lee and Mr. Robert Ting. In attendance, too, were Auxiliary Board members, Mr. Kalong Katik and Ms Leandra Alfred, as well as members of the Regional Baha'i Council North, namely, Mdm Ilam Langgoh, Mr. Nyawai Unsa and Riki Pindie. Organized jointly by the Regional Baha'i Council North and the Area Growth Committee for Suai-Niah cluster, and with logistic support provided by the local spiritual assembly and the local community, the conference progressed smoothly without a hitch, right from the opening address by the NSA chairman on the first day until his

closing address the following day. In his opening address, the NSA chairman stated that the purpose of the conference was to keep the friends abreast of the on-goings in the Baha'i world, especially the current Five Year Plan, vis-à-vis the current turmoil in the outside world. Having seen how much better off the friends were materially compared to the old days, he remarked that it must be for this reason that the beloved Universal of Justice has invited the Sarawak Baha'i community as one of the 45 worldwide selected to participate in the international financial collaboration programme "*to assist other national communities which have not been endowed materially to the same extent*". As such, he asked the friends to support this programme. The conference proper started with a talk by the NSA chairman on "Organization and Growth of the Faith". This is followed by a talk by ABM Kalong on "Our Role in the Five Year Plan". After a short tea break, Robert Ting spoke about "Emphasis on Local Spiritual Assembly, Nineteen Day Feast and Devotional Meeting". After dinner, the conference resumed with a talk by Marilyn Lee on "Lifeblood of the Cause", using "cerita" (stories) to drive home her points on the spiritual obligation of each and every Baha'i to contribute to the Fund as the privilege to contribute is only accorded to the believers and nobody else. The evening of the first day ended with a social programme where friends from each cluster presented songs, dances, etc., before everyone retired for the night.

The next day started with a talk by Mr. Kalong on "Extracts from the 28

December 2010 message from the Universal House of Justice". The group then retreated to the official opening of the Baha'i Centre, which had just been renovated.

After tea break, the participants were grouped according to their respective clusters to discuss their coming activities and come up with plans which were later presented in a plenary session.

What followed were a talk by Mr. Kalong on "Abdu'l-Baha – the Perfect Exemplar" and another one by Marilyn on Baha'i identity with respect to registration of birth certification and identity card, and Baha'i marriage. The subject on Baha'i marriage raised a lot of interest and request was made for a course on this to be held.

The conference, interspersed in between the talks on both days by a skit presentation on the power of confirmation as well as songs by the junior youth, ended with a closing remark by the NSA chairman.

In addition to having attained its purpose, the conference had also provided an atmosphere for great fellowship and camaraderie for the participants, especially the veteran Baha'is, as friends re-acquainted with one another after a long hiatus of big conferences like in the past.

"It is a joy to see old Baha'is, such as, Leborg and Unsa who were once great travelling teachers in their prime, at the conference," said a participant, who added: "It is so uplifting to hear again Unsa chanting the 'Refresh and gladden my spirit...' prayer in his inimitable Iban pantun style."

So, there is only one right way to describe this conference: "It is a huge success!"



Conference in Sebuyau, Kampung Belimbing Besi, 3-4 December 2011

Report by Bari Enkek

The first day of the conference started with registration of attendees by Ricky Vincent at the Bahá'í Centre. There were about a hundred people attending the conference, including those that arrived only on the second day. Many friends from neighbouring clusters, Simunjan and Asajaya responded to invitations to attend the conference. The conference aimed at raising awareness of the friends in the current development of the Faith in the country and as well as in other countries.

Five speakers spoke on *"Our role in the Five Year Plan"* which was further elucidated by extracts from the 28 December 2010 message from the House of Justice, *"Organization and Growth of the Cause"*, *"Local Spiritual Assemblies, Nineteen Day Feasts and Devotional Meetings"*, *"Life Blood of the Cause"*, *"Abdu'l-Bahá The Perfect Exemplar"* and *"Bahá'í Marriage"*.

The friends were not only very much inspired by the various speakers but were equally happy to meet many friends whom they had not met for quite sometime. Meals were taken in the *ruai* of the longhouse. The women folks had taken up the task of preparing refreshment and food for the event and thus missed the opportunity to attend and listen to the talks. The evening session was lively with entertainment by representatives from the various clusters. Outstation friends were provided accommodation for the night by individual families in the hosting community.

The second day programme include more talk based on the 28 December 2010 message and in which a video of the recent 25th anniversary celebration of the House of Worship in New Delhi was shown. This helps to raise the awareness of the believers that the Faith has many admirers in other parts of the world. The last session was dedicated to making plans for participating clusters. "Dessert" after lunch include feasting on durian fruits and rambutans which many families generously shared with their visitors.

The conference indeed had brought joy, fellowship and inspiration to the souls and satisfaction to the palate. The Local Spiritual Assembly of Kampung Belimbing Besi deserved a big "Thank You".

Bangladeshi judges and lawyers attend unique conference on Baha'i law

18 December 2011

DHAKA, Bangladesh — Almost 180 legal professionals from around the country gathered here for a conference on the Baha'i Faith and the personal and family laws that apply to its members. Held in the auditorium of the country's Supreme Court, the unprecedented event aimed to prepare advocates and judges who might be required to assist Baha'is with legal matters, such as marriage and inheritance.

In Bangladesh, there is a division between "public" and "private" – or "personal" – laws, with family affairs dealt with under religious practice. Some 90 percent of the country is Muslim, and Islamic personal and family laws are well understood.

"It is significant because if there is any problem among Baha'is, and they go to regular courts, the judges have to rule according to Baha'i personal law," said Jabbar Eidelkhani, a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors who spoke at the conference.

"So the advocates and judges that attended this conference, as well as training sessions previously, will now know more about how such laws apply to Baha'is," he said.

The day-long conference, held on 3 December, was opened by Mizanur Rahman, chairman of Bangladesh's Human Rights Commission.

"If religion is for ensuring human dignity then the Baha'i personal law is something which addresses that theme. In this respect it is not different than any other religion," said Dr. Rahman.

Also addressing the conference was Justice Delwar Hossain, who presented a keynote paper on the origin and background of Baha'i personal laws, and advocate Samarendra Nath Goswami, the event's main organizer, who discussed the significance of Baha'i laws to legal professionals. Mr. Goswami has previously conducted small training sessions on the subject.

There have been Baha'is in Bangladesh since the 1920s. The first local Spiritual Assembly was formed in Dhaka in 1952. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Bangladesh was established in 1972, shortly after the country declared its independence. There are an estimated 13,000 Baha'is currently living in the country.



Some of the speakers who addressed the conference on Baha'i law held at Bangladesh's Supreme Court on 3 December. Pictured, from left to right, are: Dr. Mizanur Rahman, chairman of the Bangladesh Human Rights Commission; Mr. S.N. Goswami, advocate; Mr. Justice Delwar Hossain; and Dr. Jena Shahidi, a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Bangladesh.

Nineteen-Day Feast—Its inauguration, ratification, nature and institution

The institution of the Nineteen-Day Feast provides the recognized and regular occasion for general consultation on the part of the community, and for consultation between the Spiritual Assembly and the members of the community. The conduct of the period of consultation at Nineteen-Day Feasts is a vital function of each Spiritual Assembly.

From the words of `Abdu'l-Bahá: "The Nineteen-Day Feast was inaugurated by the Báb and ratified by Bahá'u'lláh, in His Holy Book, the Aqdas, so that people may gather together and outwardly show fellowship and love, that the Divine mysteries may be disclosed. The object is concord, that through this fellowship hearts may be perfectly united, and reciprocity and mutual helpfulness be established. Because the members of the world of humanity are unable to exist without being banded together, co-operation and helpfulness is the basis of human society. Without the realization of these two great principles no great movement is pressed forward."